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AUTHOR Young, Barbara N.

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at how cooperating teachers and student teachers interact and the effects, if any, on the student teacher. The study explored the cases of three student teachers and their cooperating teachers, focusing on whether the student teachers appeared to experience any positive or negative effects as a result of a matched pairing placement or a mismatched pairing placement with regard to their theoretical orientation to the reading process. Potential pairs for the study were identified through Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) scores; student teachers and cooperating teachers were not purposely matched or mismatched. Data from the study were used to glean student teachers' perceptions of their student-teaching experiences, which were then viewed in relation to their matched or mismatched pairing placements. Although Pair One held dramatically-opposed theoretical orientations to the reading process, with no overlap, their mismatched pairing placement did not produce negative effects in the student teacher; in fact, it produced positive effects due to the personality traits of the cooperating teacher. Pair Two appeared to be in perfect harmony throughout the student teaching experience; positive effects in this case were due to both theoretical orientation similarity and the personality traits of the cooperating teacher. Pair Three held dramatically opposed theoretical orientations to the reading process with no possible overlap, as well as dissimilar attitudes, understanding, focus, and expectations. In this case, the student teacher was displeased with the placement and felt that the cooperating teacher did not offer positive support. Findings of the study revealed that certain personality traits of cooperating teachers, in addition to belief systems or theoretical orientation, appear to be important factors in determining whether student teachers perceived their student teaching placements to be negative or positive. (Contains 10 references.) (ND)

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Student-Teacher Placement: Three Case Studies in Match and Mismatch Contexts

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Barbara N. Young
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT
MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE 37132

MTSU P.O. Box X066 Office (615) 898-2209
E-mail: BAYOUNG@MTSU.EDU Home (615) 896-7557

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Given widespread agreement that the student-teaching experience is viewed as the most significant aspect of the teacher education program, and the cooperating teacher is perceived to be the most significant agent in the student-teaching process, it follows that research must explore this field-based experience. Specifically, there is a need for research strategies that penetrate the complex and interrelated world of field-based experiences. Most research done in this area has relied heavily on statistical data, and, as a result, has oversimplified and ignored many complex factors present in the transactions and context of the field experience itself (Carter, 1993). Also, this research did not comprehensively take into account the complexities present in the interactions between student teachers and cooperating teachers, nor did it fully address questions concerning significant influences of particular cooperating teachers on student teachers and resulting effects, if any, of transactions between the pair.

In order to examine the field experiences and the perceptions of student teachers within the field experience, and to go beyond the narrow assumptions of the empirical-analytic paradigm, naturalistic methodology was employed. Through the use of this ethnographic-style methodology, the inquirer was able to enter the complex and interrelated world of the classroom and gather authentic, qualitative data for documentation and analysis. Specifically, the transactions that occurred between three selected student teachers and their respective cooperating teachers when the student teacher and cooperating teacher held the same theoretical orientation and when they held conflicting orientations to the reading process provided the context as the researcher attempted to gain an interpretation of each student teacher's own reality. Since the inquirer was attempting to find out <u>how</u> the cooperating teacher and the student teacher interacted and the effects, if any, on the student teacher, the research questions were best informed by data rich in description of people, places, and conversations--attitudes and behaviors--it was

necessary that qualitative rather than quantitative measures and methodology be used (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1984).

The following questions framed the study:

(1) Does the student teacher appear to experience any positive or negative effects as result of a matched pairing placement with a cooperating teacher with regard to theoretical orientation to the reading process?

(2) Does the student teacher appear to experience any positive or negative effects as a result of a mismatched pairing placement with a cooperating teacher with regard to theoretical orientation to the reading process?

Data were gathered from three contexts in one setting for each pair of participants. As identified by Patterson (1987) and Burk (1989), Context A represents observation and recording of the original transactions. Context B represents artifacts or products related to the original transactions. Context C represents cued responses from the informants concerning Context A transactions. In most cases, the researcher collects primary data in Context A and B, using secondary data from Context C to complete triangulation. Specifically, Context A included the observation of primary, naturally-occurring transactions between individuals such as audio-taped conversations and field note data. Context B included products and/or artifacts resulting from Context A transactions such as reflective journals, lesson plans, unit plans, reading course overviews, and work samples of the children in the student teachers' classrooms. Context C included informants' cued responses concerning those transactions, specifically the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) (DeFord, 1979) questionnaires and interviews (see Table 1). Analysis of data noted above was combined to produce case studies of the student teacher/cooperating teacher pairs. Table 1 outlines a framework with these three contexts delineated, and Table 2 lists data phases, collection sequence, contexts, and sources.

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Table 1.

Data Contexts, Methods, Sources.
(Burk, 1989; Patterson, 1987)

Context	*Data-Gathering Method*	*Source*
A (Primary/Naturally-occurring Transactions)	1. Observational Field Notes. 2. Audio-taped conferences.	{Primary
B (Artifacts/Products of Transactions)	1. Reflective Journals. 2. Reading Course Overviews. 3. Lesson Plans, Unit Plans. 4. Children's Work Samples.	{Primary
C (Cued Responses)	1. TORP Questionnaires. 2. Interviews.	{Secondary

Table 2.

Data Phases, Collection Sequence, Contexts, and Sources.

Phase		*Collection Sequence*	*Contexts/Sources*
One (I)	Week 1 of Student Teaching.	1. TORP Questionnaires. 2. Initial Interviews.	C/Secondary C/Secondary
Two (II)	Weeks 2-9 of Student Teaching.	1. Observational Field Notes. 2. Audio-taped conferences. 3. Reflective Journals. 4. Mid-Point Interviews. 5. Reading Course Overviews. 6. Lesson Plans, Unit Plans. 7. Children's work samples.	A/Primary A/Primary B/Primary C/Secondary B/Primary B/Primary B/Primary
Three (III)	Week 10 of Student Teaching.	1. TORP Questionnaires. 2. Final Interviews.	C/Secondary C/Secondary

For ethical reasons, student teachers and cooperating teachers were not purposely matched or mismatched. Random, arbitrary pairing was assigned as usual. However, following student-teaching placement, pairs of student teachers and cooperating teachers were administered the TORP (DeFord, 1979) to determine which pairs would be selected for the study. After potential pairs were identified through TORP scores (see Table 3), three specific pairs were chosen due to logistics and grade level considerations in addition to TORP

scores (see Table 4). They were contacted in person and asked if they would agree to participate in the study. All readily agreed to do so.

Table 3.

TORP Scores.

Pair	Phase	Scores: Student Teacher	Scores: Cooperating Teacher
One (Mismatch	I	61[a]	127[b]
One	III	84[c]	--
Two (Match	I	67[a]	65[a]
Two	III	55[a]	--
Three (Mismatch	I	117[b]	59[a]
Three	III	120[b]	--

[a] = Phonics Orientation
[b] = Whole Language Orientation
[c] = Skills Orientation

Table 4.

Student Teacher Pairing and Theoretical Orientation.

Pair	Grade	Theoretical Orientation: Student Teacher	Theoretical Orientation: Cooperating Teacher
One/Mismatch	1	Phonics	Whole Language
Two/Match	2	Phonics	Phonics
Three/Mismatch	3	Whole Language	Phonics

The data were analyzed by "organizing them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, pg. 153). Comparisons were made beginning with initial data collection and continued throughout the entire data collection and analysis. Categories of meaning emerged from initial data, and with more data collection and analysis, these categories became defined and able to be understood. This inductive data analysis is the process used for "making sense" of field data

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and is quite similar to "content analysis" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and it has been described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) under the heading of "constant comparative method." The analysis was an ongoing process in which the data were examined and studied both within and across cases in order to inform the emergent structure of the data collection phases and to seek patterns which informed the research questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, data were used to glean student teachers' perceptions of their student-teaching experiences. These perceptions were viewed in relation to their matched or mismatched pairing placements with regard to theoretical orientation to the reading process. Conclusions are addressed in terms of interpretation of the data.

Although Pair One held diametrically-opposing theoretical orientations to the reading process, with no overlap, their mismatched pairing placement did not produce negative effects in the student teacher. In fact, it produced positive effects due to the personality traits of the cooperating teacher such as openness, empathy, helpfulness, supportiveness, creativity, nurturing, understanding, encouragement, positive attitude, and kindness, that were recorded and commented upon by the student teacher in her final Reflective Journal entry:

> I found my student teacher experience a wonderful learning experience. My cooperating teacher was wonderful. We got along extremely well because we had a lot in common. We both enjoy incorporating whole language activities into the classroom. Not only was she my cooperating teacher, she was also a good friend. I could not have been happier with my teacher. I will miss her and my students a great deal. (Entry 35)

As a result, the inquirer concluded this particular mismatch (i.e., Phonics Student Teacher/Whole Language Cooperating Teacher), in and of itself, did not cause the student teacher to experience negative effects. This suggested to the inquirer that the personality traits of the cooperating teacher noted above, in addition to the belief system or theoretical

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orientation, were equally important as to whether or not the student teacher viewed the student-teaching experience as negative or positive.

Pair Two appeared to be in perfect harmony from the first week through the last week of the student-teaching experience. Although Pair Two held the same theoretical orientation to the reading process, and they agreed on methodology, materials, instructional implementation, and had similar expectations regarding the teaching of reading, the student-teacher's positive perception of her cooperating teacher seemed to involve more than theoretical orientation similarity. For example, the student teacher repeatedly referred to her cooperating teacher's "positive attitude," willingness to "discuss and brainstorm" ideas with her, supportiveness, encouragement, and kindness.

Positive effects were recorded and commented upon by the student teacher in her final Reflective Journal entry:

> As my student-teaching experience comes to an end, I feel happy but also sad. I look back on all of the things that happened to me, the experiences, the influence of my cooperating teacher, and I had a great teacher. Sometimes I think I learned more in my student teaching than in <u>any</u> class I had in college. (Entry 15)

As a result, the inquirer concluded that this particular match (i.e., Phonics Student Teacher/Phonics Cooperating Teacher), in and of itself, did not cause the student teacher to experience positive effects. As in Case Study One, this suggested to the inquirer that the personality traits of the cooperating teacher noted above, in addition to the belief system or theoretical orientation, were important in determining the student teacher's perception of the student-teaching experience as negative or positive.

Pair Three held diametrically-opposing theoretical orientations to the reading process with no possible overlap in their theories. Consequently, the student teacher and cooperating teacher had conflicting opinions and employed different instructional techniques, materials, and methodology for teaching reading in keeping with their respective orientations. Other discrepancies

included theories of language learning, understanding of what reading is, and attitudes toward teaching emerged through interview responses and conference conversations. In practice, this pair implemented reading instruction quite differently as evidenced through interview responses, lesson plans, unit plans, and observational field note data. In addition to holding conflicting theoretical orientations, Pair Three was dissimilar in attitudes, understandings, focus, expectations, and actual implementation of language learning practices.

Unlike the student teachers from Case Studies One and Two that were pleased with their student-teaching placements, the Case Study Three student teacher was displeased. After examining and analyzing the data, the inquirer concluded that the cooperating teacher was not perceived by the student teacher as offering much guidance, support, or encouragement. Nor was she able, from the perspective of the student teacher, to create an overall context or atmosphere in which the student teacher felt supported and/or encouraged by the actions and attitudes of the cooperating teacher, or one in which the student teacher felt she was learning how to be a teacher. The student teacher felt that her creativity was stifled, and her student-teaching experience was quite limited due to the amount of conformity that was expected by the cooperating teacher. As a result, the student teacher experienced frustration, anxiety, discouragement, and anger in relation to limitations she perceived her cooperating teacher placed upon her with regard to readiness to experiment with new ideas, materials, and techniques.

Numerous Reflective Journal entries recorded by the student teacher presented these perspectives:

> ...I don't see any joy in reading in the classroom. (Entry 2)
>
> ...I can't really change anything though---I'm the "student" teacher and she is the "teacher," (Entry 12)
>
> ...I am not going to want to give this class back to my cooperating teacher. We are now laughing together, learning together, sharing

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together. (Entry 22)

Student Teacher Three's final Reflective Journal entry, unlike the final journal entries of the other two student teachers, did not voice appreciation or gratitude for her cooperating teacher's guidance and/or for the student-teaching experience itself. Rather, she said:

> As my time in this classroom comes to an end, I find I hate to leave these kids...My classroom will be less rigid and structured...I have arranged with Ms._____(Cooperating Teacher) to return to this classroom for a few hours each week to read to the kids and listen to them read. I'm looking forward to it...I want my own classroom and students and all the hard work that goes with being a positive teacher. (Entry 34)

As a result, the inquirer concluded that the Pair Three student teacher appeared to experience significant negative effects within the context of this particular mismatched pairing placement (i.e., Whole Language Student Teacher/Phonics Cooperating Teacher) with regard to theoretical orientation to the reading process. In addition, although a mismatch was present in both Case Studies One and Two, with both mismatches involving Phonics and Whole Language orientations, two diametrically-opposed belief systems allowing for no overlap, negative effects were perceived only by the Pair Three student teacher. As a result, the inquirer concluded that this particular mismatch (i.e., Whole Language Student Teacher/Phonics Cooperating Teacher), in and of itself, did not cause the student teacher to experience negative effects.

In all three case studies, certain personality traits of the cooperating teachers, in addition to belief systems or theoretical orientations, appeared to be important factors in determining whether or not the student teachers perceived their student-teaching experiences to be negative or positive. As a result, the inquirer concluded that the **combination of the direction of the mismatch** in theoretical orientation in Case Study Three (i.e., Student

Teacher/Whole Language orientation; Cooperating Teacher/Phonics orientation), and the personality traits of the cooperating teacher contributed significantly to the Pair Three student teacher experiencing negative effects during student teaching. In these three case studies, certain personality traits of the cooperating teachers, in addition to their belief systems or theoretical orientations, appeared to be important factors in determining whether or not the student teachers viewed their student-teaching experiences as negative or positive.

As Puckett and McClam (1990) note, most of the studies on student-teaching supervision are written from the perspective of the college supervisor or the cooperating teacher, leaving out the student teacher. Most studies including the perspective of the student teacher focus on roles and duties, leaving out the qualities of effective supervisors. Also, studies dealing with the student-teaching experience usually do not examine what happens to the student teacher after the student-teaching experience. With the widespread push to reform public education and teacher education programs, the demand is great for a body of knowledge to shed light on the complex world of the student teachers and their interactions with their cooperating teachers. Teacher educators should be willing and prepared to examine their own professed and demonstrated theories. As professed by Sagan (1979), "belief systems that cannot survive scrutiny are probably not worth having" (p. 289).

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